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SUBJECT: Hesse Hosts Large Event for OIF/OEF Military Families

1. SUMMARY: The state of Hesse recently hosted a day of appreciation for 2200 U.S. military and family members -- in particular families of those deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan -- in the most recent expression of Hesse's desire to be a good host for U.S. forces. END SUMMARY.

2. On June 24, the Ambassador attended a large picnic hosted by Hesse Minister-President Roland Koch (CDU) for families of deployed soldiers stationed in Hesse. More than 2,200 soldiers and family members (including approx. 700 children) enjoyed an afternoon of fun and food at the historic Hessenpark. The state originally targeted families of 1st Armored Division soldiers still deployed in Iraq, but expanded it to all soldiers and their families (including those living in nearby Rheinland-Pfalz and Mannheim installations). German and American sponsors chipped in to provide food and activities such as basketball and football clinics by German professional teams. About 60% of the estimated EUR 90,000 cost was covered by donations.

3. Hesse M-P Koch, who spent almost three hours at the event, gave an opening speech (to rousing applause) recognizing the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers and their families and declaring that the state would always welcome them. The Ambassador thanked the state of Hesse and M-P Koch for this latest gesture of support. Mrs. Deanie Dempsey (wife of deployed 1AD Commander Maj. General Martin Dempsey) spoke on behalf of families.

4. COMMENT: Regional newspapers gave very positive coverage to the event, the latest expression of Hesse's efforts to be seen as a welcoming host for American forces. END COMMENT.

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